

Testimony of the Connecticut Audubon Society to the Environment Committee
of the Connecticut General Assembly in strong support of H.B. No. 5140 An Act Concerning
The Hand-Harvesting Of Horseshoe Crabs In The State..



February 22, 2022

The Connecticut Audubon Society thanks the Committee and the sponsors of **H.B. No. 5140 An Act Concerning The Hand-Harvesting of Horseshoe Crabs in the State** for proposing this important resolution and for the opportunity to express our strong support this important measure.

The Connecticut Audubon Society strongly supports any effort to restore populations of horseshoe crabs in Long Island Sound. Connecticut needs to play an appropriate role to focus on rapid restoration of the population to carrying capacity so horseshoe crabs can quickly resume a functional role in ecosystems. Increasing horseshoe crabs to carrying capacity is critical to the viability of the federally listed Red Knot (*Calidris canutus rufa*), other migratory shorebirds, sportfish, and forage fish that occur on the Sound.

The Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) manages the horseshoe crab stock from Maine to eastern Florida. In 2009, the conservation community joined with the ASMFC to better manage the harvest of horseshoe crabs (ASMFC 2009). The resultant Adaptive Resource Management (ARM) framework represented a useful new tool in our efforts to restore horseshoe crab populations after the devastating overfishing of the 1990s. Ten years later restoration remains a distant goal, particularly in our “New York” region (Connecticut, New York, and northern New Jersey) where stocks of horseshoe crabs have been determined to be in poor condition. This is occurring even though the reported commercial harvest has been well below the horseshoe crab quota established by the ASMFC for CT.

Horseshoe crabs are primarily harvested commercially to be used as bait for the commercial American eel and whelk/conch fisheries along the Atlantic Coast. Connecticut has so far implemented harvest restrictions that prohibit hand-harvest on Milford Point, Sandy Point in West Haven, and Menunketesuck Island in Westbrook and recently the Town of Stratford included their beaches as a closed area. We strongly feel that because of the poor condition of the horseshoe crab population in our region and the inability of the population to recover under the current fishery regulations, the only remaining course of action is to invoke a moratorium on the harvest of horseshoe crabs and to ban the use of horseshoe crab as bait in Connecticut. Similar action should be implemented by the State of New York. We strongly support any efforts to restore populations of this critically important natural resource and restricting the hand harvesting of horseshoe crabs will be an important step in our efforts to recover populations of this species and the ecosystem that depends on their presence.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input on this important matter.

Patrick M. Comins, Executive Director

Founded in 1898, the Connecticut Audubon Society is an independent organization that conserves Connecticut's environment through science-based education and advocacy focused on the state's bird populations and habitats. We own and manage 20 preserves covering more than 3,300 acres in all areas of the state, and we work with landowners to help them manage their land for the benefit of birds and other wildlife.